

**Lawrence Coffee
Roping for God
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**Interviewer: David Hall
Videographer: Patrick Dunavan**

Lawrence Coffee (LC): I've lived here since—well, for sixty-seven year. The only time I left was when I moved from here and went to high school in Austin, Texas. I went to school in Austin for nine months, uh, at Anderson High School. And after I got out of high school, I moved back to Blanco and lived here in Peyton Colony for—up until now.

David Hall (DH): So you were actually born in Peyton Colony.

LC: Yeah. I was born about the same place where I live now—just up the road at our home place. And my grandmother was the midwife, and she was the one that delivered me.

DH: Was your grandmother a midwife for other families and other children?

LC: Most all of the black people that lived here in the colony—she was the one that was the midwife and, you know, did things here.

DH: I know you have a cousin Leon, who was actually born in the Old Blanco County Courthouse.

LC: Um-hm.

DH: Well, were the midwives working there also?

LC: No. I think—I think Leon was Dr. Flannery. It was a doctor called Dr. Flannery. I think he was the one that delivered Leon. Yeah.

DH: But before that most of the births—

LC: All of the ones with midwives was here in the Colony. They didn't—they didn't go to Blanco.

DH: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

DH: What do you do now as a vocation?

LC: Uh, I shoe horses and train horses. I still do that some. My main occupation is shoein' horses, and I build roads and clear brush and stuff for different people mostly around close here in the Colonies, mostly for the people I work for.

DH: So you still train horses.

LC: Yeah. I still—

DH: D'you break 'em?

LC: Yeah. I got four now I'm breakin', you know.

DH: What do you do with a horse that's hard to break—that just won't mind you?

LC: Breakin' a horse—I consider a horse the same as a person—as a human bein'. They got—to me, they got the same brains as a human bein'. And you treat them nice; they treat you nice—same wi' a person. You know, and if you're gonna train a horse, the first thing you got to do is get their confidence. The horse has got to get his confidence in you, and you get your confidence in him. And by trainin', you teach him to—if they completely wild, you put 'em in the pen. Let 'em run away from you. You stand there in the middle of the stall and talk to 'em 'til they face ya. Once they face you, you know that you're winnin' their confidence. As long as they got their rear to you, they don't trust you. So when they start lookin' around and lookin' at you, you start makin' steps towards them. And eventually, you can touch 'em. And then once you touch 'em, you back away from 'em and see do they still look at you. And if they do, well, go back and touch 'em again. And then soon, you finally get to be able to rub 'em and just start like that. Put your arm around 'em. You know, let 'em know that you're not gonna hurt 'em. And that's the first step in trainin' a horse, you know. And you never do get in no hurry.

DH: Ever been kicked?

LC: Yeah. Yeah. You know, not a whole lot. But, you know, you start at the head, and then you work your way back to the rear. And I do a lots of scratching on horses. And horses feel like, you know, when you scratch 'em, they finally—you know, they enjoy that. So that's the way I start out training one.

DH: Now you told me a good story one time about a horse or two would get a little unruly and want to run off from you.

LC: Um hm. I've had lots of horses that people bring me that are—is already spoiled. You know, some horses that—you know, people get on a horse, the first thing they do is start ridin', and the next thing they want to do is run. And they like to run back to the barn. And before you know it, they get a horse, and that's all the horse wanna do is run. So then they wanna get em slowed down, and they don't know how to do it. So then they bring 'em to me, and I teach 'em, you know, how to slow down and start and stop and do that kinda stuff. And I would start out with tellin' about me runnin' 'em up the mountain, you know.

DH: What mountain is this?

LC: I call it Mount Horeb. That's the mountain up above my house. I call it Mount Horeb. It's Mount Horeb Mountain. And it's so strange because when I started studying the Bible, they talked about Jesus going up a mountain called Mount Horeb. And I always say that this is where this church got its name from was that mountain up there. That's the way I figured it.

DH: But this horse didn't want to go up on the mountain?

LC: No. Well, he wanted to run. So I just turned him loose and let him run. And I'd steer him and let him turn and go up to the top of that mountain. And you know just runnin' to the top of that mountain is—it ain't long before he's out of breath and tired. And then I let him realize that if you pull on him, he want to take off again, well—when they get to where that you can drop the reins and let 'em walk around, well, they enjoy that. And then you pull up on 'em, they stop. That's teachin' a horse. That's all it is.

DH: When did you get into roping?

LC: I've roped all my life.

DH: You started as a kid?

LC: I started as a kid on a Welsh pony. You know, and that's the way the kids around here in Peyton Colony had their fun is ropin, ridin' cows at night. And that's why we got started. And then my dad had a bunch of goats. And we had to follow these goats around and herd 'em. And as we did that, well, we'd cut us one out and drive 'em away from the herd. Then when they started back, we'd rope 'em coming back towards the

herd of goats. And they always said if you can rope a goat, you can rope anything 'cause a goat never would run straight. You know, they'd always run crooked, and some of 'em would stop and all that kinda stuff.

DH: Well, pretty soon it got to be serious with you. I mean you went into competition, didn't you?

LC: Yeah. After I found out about rodeo, my brother moved to Austin. And it was some jackpot rodeos like in Bastrop and a little town called Caldwell, Dime Box is where we would have rodeo. That was the only place that black people could have ropin' with competition that we knew about. So on Saturday nights, we'd go down there and have a competition ropin' between each other.

DH: This was about what year?

LC: That was in '57, '58, and I finally got me a horse and started ridin', and I found out, you know, that some money could be won at it. So it was in 1968 was when I—no it was in '70. The black people in the white rodeos—they wouldn't let black rope with 'em at white rodeos. So in 1974, I went to work for this guy which worked out of San Antonio, and, uh, I started trainin' his son how to rope, and he got real good. He got to be a world champion junior calf roper. And we was goin' around, so they asked me to go to a rodeo with 'em in Comfort, Tex—no in Centerpoint. And I told my dad I was goin' to that rodeo, and he said, "No, they don't allow no black people in Centerpoint."

DH: The boy you were training was a white boy.

LC: Yeah...yeah.

DH: I see.

LC: And I was ropin' with some white friends of mine in San Antonio because they wanted me to train them some of the stuff that I knew. And after I trained 'em, well, they told me—they said that I could win a lots of money ropin' at their rodeo. And I said, "Well, I don't even know how to enter." So one of my friends said, "Well, I'll enter you, and all you gotta do is show up." And then Centerpoint, Texas—that's when I showed up. And it wasn't easy because when I rode in the rodeo arena, I got called lots of bad names. And it didn't make me no difference, you know. I just rode around the arena. When it come my time to rope, well, I roped this calf, and my horse stopped so fast it threwed me over the top of his head. I turned a double flip and landed right where the calf was. I just picked him up and tied him. Well, everybody just thought that was the

greatest thing they'd ever saw [DH laughs]. So we sat around. I rode out. All my friends said, "Well, I know aint nobody gonna beat that time, you know. That was just too fast." Well, they never called my time out. Finally, the crowd started, you know, hollerin' across to the rodeo announcer say, "Call his time out. We wanna know what his time was." And he finally called me to the announcin' stand, said, "They didn't catch your time on the watch." So I didn't know what to do then, so I had to rope my calf over. And I didn't even run him. I just stayed in the box and rode out, and I come home. And then after that, I started goin' to a lots of white rodeos, and I got to be friends with everybody and from then, that's where I got started. You know, really rodeoin' is a serious business.

DH: So it sounds like you might've actually been the first black cowboy to compete in a white rodeo.

LC: In this area—in the west part of Texas, I was. Yeah.

DH: Well, that's breaking new ground.

LC: Yeah.

DH: And you went on to win some championships. Tell us about that.

LC: I won all—I went to open rodeos, and I won, you know, all the championships in the ropin's around in them, and then when I turned forty-five, they had a Texas senior pro, and I joined it, and I probably won it seven, eight times as a calf roper. Each age group—we had age groups from forty-five to fifty-five and from fifty-five to sixty-five—and I won the championships on all of those different age groups each year. And then I finally went pro and started rodeoin' and goin' all over the world in 1995. And I won each championship in calf ropin' and ribbon ropin' in it each year.

DH: What's the difference between calf roping and ribbon roping?

LC: Ribbon ropin' is where you're back in the box and the same way as calf ropin', but they ties a ribbon on the calf's tail. And then a lady stands out in the middle of the arena. And when you rope the calf, she comes by and take the ribbon off the calf's tail and run back in the box. And the lady that was my partner was named Nancy Tatum, and she lived in Phoenix, Arizona, and we won the world three years in a row in ribbon ropin'.

DH: And you won the master's pro tie down senior calf roping three times.

LC: Yeah. The national senior pro—I was reserve the first year, and then I was world champion three more years outta that. And I went all over the world then—plumb into Canada—on all different sides of Canada I went—lots of time in California and all up through that-a-way.

DH: Do you still rope?

LC: Yeah. Yeah. I'll always rope. You know, that's just part of the Coffee's, you know, life style.

DH: You're not ropin' in competition?

LC: Well, I do some. I don't go as much 'cause I attend church too much. I have to take care of the church. People is always callin' me to come and help 'em in different kinda ways, and I do that kinda—

DH: You told me what you're ropin for now.

LC: Um hm. I'm ropin' for God. I'm ropin' for—my main serious now is ropin'—tryin' to win people's life over to God. Yes, sir. You know, it's as much fun findin' someone that don't know the Lord and trainin' them about God as it is to find someone that wanna be a calf roper and learnin' them how to rope calves. So, you know, we talk about winnin', and as you win you gets—I call it the big head. And you win, you know, things and what you strive to do. But the greatest win of all is when, you know, that you feel like you got yourself prepared to go home to God. Now that's the championship you wanna win.

DH: I'm looking at a picture of you here. I know you've seen it. It's a great picture in a book called *The Amazing Faith of Texas* compiled by Roy Spence. And it's a picture of you, I believe. Where was that picture taken?

LC: That's in the old schoolhouse.

DH: It's obvious that you're a man of faith. Could you tell us how your faith is tied in with Peyton Colony and the Mount Horeb Church?

LC: When we first—this church was built, and I started comin' to church, you know, all I ever knew in the way that I understood was it was my whole Baptist church. And then when I started studying my Bible and we used to call it—long time ago used to call it a black Baptist church and white Baptist church. During Christmas holidays, lots of the time we'd go up to Blanco and sing at the white Baptist church. When we had somethin'

down here, some of the people from that church would come down here, and we'd sing. My faith is that churches is just a name. You got religions. You got Baptists, Methodists—all different kinda—nowadays, its every kinda religion that you can think about. But when I taught religion, it's not really religion. That's just a name. We're all goin' to the same place. But our life and growin' up, we have been taught that this is the religion that you come up under. So that's what we are. But it aint but one, and that's workin' to go to heaven. And when you get to heaven, it's not gonna be the Baptists over here, the Methodists over here. It's gonna be all of us together. And that's what's so great about—I like that book they call *Amazing Faith*. And the main thing is you gotta have faith in God. It's not a Baptist faith; it's not a Methodist. That is just have faith in God. And I always say get your own personal relationship with God. And if you really know him, then you don't have nothin' to fear. And when I'm talkin' to someone, that's what I always tell 'em—to get your own personal relationship with God. And if you and God got a understandin', then don't worry about anything. So I call this church—it's not really Mount Horeb Baptist Church. This church nowadays—it's strange to come here some Sundays, and we have more white here than we do black. And that's what it's all about. It's not a white church or a black church. It's just something you've been taught. And I'm hopin' that one of these days, we'll all be together, which we're gonna be when we go to heaven. And that's the way I look at—you know, when I think about churches.

DH: You're a deacon in this church, right?

LC: Yes. Yeah. I've been a deacon—this'll be the third year that I became a deacon.

DH: How do you become a deacon, and exactly what does that mean to you?

LC: A deacon is really—when the pastor asked me whether I wanted to be one, I accepted that. And you're put on trial. You see how much you are really dedicated to the church and whether you really spend time with workin' and helpin' and doin' things. A deacon has got the responsibility of keepin' the church goin'. And once you're ordained, well, then you have jobs. A deacon has got as much of a responsibility almost as a pastor.

DH: You didn't come to this real serious, all abiding faith real early, did you?

LC: No, sir.

DH: You told some stories.

LC: I grew up as a child comin' to church and bein' taught about church. My mother taught me about church. And it's so great because the Bible says, "Bring up a child in the way that they should go, and they never will depart from it." Well, I departed from it. But it was still in my blood. It's kinda like the Coffees—all of them is known about—their bloodline is foolin' with horses and stuff. Well, when I'd left the church and when I become knowin' how to rodeo, I thought that was the only thing in my life that I needed to know how to do. And I rodeoed for years and years. And as my mother got older and the church started gettin' smaller and smaller, I told her when she moved to Austin, I said, "Don't worry about the church. I'll keep it goin'." And that was my job. I promised her that. And so as I started doin' it, I found out that servin' God is just as much enjoyment as rodeoin' or doin' whatever. You know, God will always allow you to do anything you want to, but as the Bible says, "Six days I work. The seventh day I rest." So I take Sunday for my restin' day and come in here to church and enjoy doin' that. The rest of the week, I can ride horses and play around and do whatever I want to—rodeoin', whatever.

DH: Before you made that promise to your mother, though, were there some Sundays when you kinda just passed by the church?

LC: Yeah. My mother would ask me to come to church. Every Sunday I'd promised that I was gonna come, some of my friends would say, "Are you goin' to that big ropin' in San Antonio or are you goin' to that big ropin' in Houston or somewhere?" It always happened, and that was the devil, see. He would always pop on the Sunday that I'd already made a promise to my mother. So what I would do would wait until she come to church. And after she come to church, I would crank up, and as I crossed the cattle guard, she could hear my truck come across. She just walked to the door, and she'd shake her finger at me [DH laughs], lettin' me know that she knew I was goin' to a rodeo. So finally she told me, says, "Son, just go ahead and rodeo and have your fun, and I will pray you back into church house." So as the years went by and whatever I wanted to win, God let me win it, and finally He told me, he said, "I done let you win everything you can think of." He said, "Now it's time for you to go to work for me." And I accepted that job. And as I accepted that job, my uncle passed away. And when he passed away, that's when I said, "I gotta come. There's things I gotta do for God." And his name was Austin Jones. And when Austin Jones passed, that's when I moved in, and I had to go to work. I enjoy.

DH: How do you think your mother feels about you being a deacon?

LC: Well, you know, it's so strange. After I come back, my mother seen what I was doin'. You know, she had one more person she wanted to come to God, and that was my

brother. My brother never had really joined a church or nothin'. And he said—I stopped by there one day. He was beginnin' to get sick. And I told him—me and him was sittin' in the truck talkin'—and he said, "You know, if I had a gun, I'd just take my life and get outta everybody's misery." And I looked at him, I said, "Well, that wouldn't be bad, but you wouldn't be hurtin' nobody but me and my mother and everybody else that you left." And as he got out of my truck, I said, "You know, you've give up on everybody. Why don't you try God?" And I said, "Just get up on the side of the bed some mornin' and ask, Lord, what do you want me to do? And then whatever come to your mind, that's what you do." So that followin' Wednesday, my sister called me and said that my brother got up, and his wife usually helped him to the bathroom. And he got up and walked to the bathroom by hisself and went out on the porch and walked down the road and said that she was tryin' to stop him. But he said, "Just leave me alone. I'm fine." And he called her and told her, said, "If I can live 'til that Sunday, I'm gonna walk up there and give myself to the Lord." So he done that. So that meant that in my family all of my sisters and my brothers had gave theirself to the Lord like my mother wanted us to do.

DH: She was still living?

LC: Um hm. And then after that, she passed away 'cause I felt like she knew where she was goin', and she knew where we were goin'. So her mind was at ease once he did that. So about a year after that, she passed. It's a good feelin' when you know where you're goin' and you know you're gonna see your mother again—your family again.

DH: And your mother's buried here in this graveyard?

LC: Yeah. The cemetery here—Peyton Colony.

DH: Do you tend that graveyard—take care of it?

LC: Um hm. Yes, Sir. Yes, Sir.

DH: Not many people around here left.

LC: No. See what happened to Peyton Colony is we went to school up here in this building. And then we had to leave and go to high school. And some of the kids would go to San Antonio; some would go to Austin. And once they'd go to town, then they never would wanna come back out here and live. Well, when the old people got old, then the young people that owned the land—they would sell it. And then that's how the Colony started gettin' smaller and smaller.

DH: So a lot of the responsibility of taking care of those old grave sites you've assumed?

LC: Um hm. Yeah. I usually mow it like three or four times a year.

DH: What kind of thoughts go through your mind when you're taking care of those grave sites and in that graveyard?

LC: Umm. It never really bothers me that much. I think about how great it was and the people that has gone on. But most of the people—like now when I be mowin' the grass and I see some of the people that we have been involved with in my lifetime, you don't think of the sad things. You always think of the fun things that we have done together. So it's really not that bad.

DH: About how many people are in the graveyard? Do you know?

LC: Oh, probably a couple of hundred. Some graves that's there that I don't even know who it is really. They didn't really have tombstone. They didn't really have a good marker on 'em. But most of 'em is pretty well got a name on 'em where we can recognize 'em.

DH: Have you looked to see what the oldest inscription is—oldest day on any of them that are still visible?

LC: Some of 'em probably 1900s and like that—early 1900s you know.

DH: You mentioned the school. The school is just a short distance from here.

LC: Yeah. It's just right away from the church here.

DH: It's not nearly as well maintained as the church. When did it stop being used?

LC: Probably in the early 80s—70s, late 70s, or somethin' like that.

DH: But you went to school there up until high school, right?

LC: Um hm. It got changed in '65, and the kids got to go to school in Blanco was when it was.

DH: What are your memories of that old school?

LC: Oh, lots of fun. [DH and LC laugh] Yeah. We had lots of fun. One of our greatest things was we didn't have no butane or nothin'. Our only heatin' was wood stoves, and the boys could be able to go out and cut wood for the next day. And thataway, we could get outta school early [DH laughs]. And we'd always stay there until after the teacher—you know, after four o'clock, and then we could leave. And then some of the greatest stories is whenever one of us would get a whoopin', the teacher would always let the bigger boys hold whoever was gettin' whooped—we'd have to hold him down. And that was a good fun part because we could hold the other kid down while he got a whoopin'. [laughter]

DH: Were you always holding, or were you getting whooped?

LC: No. I never was that bad. [laughter] A real good story was this one boy—he must've been pretty bad, and he got moved outta school in San Antonio, and he lived out here with his grandmother, and he went to school here—there up at the school. And this teacher kept on—you know, asked him to be good and all that, and she finally told him she was gonna whoop him. And she whooped him that mornin'. So that day at lunchtime, we went out there to the softball field. Well, she was playin' first base. And so he was the hitter, and he hit the ball. When he went, she was standin' on first base to catch the ball, and he just run. He looked down at her foot, and he stomped it, and he kept on runnin'. [laughter] Well, when he stomped it, well, she couldn't really say nothin'. He just made a mistake, but he did it on purpose. [laughter] So she couldn't walk for like three day. We had to almost pack her back up to the schoolhouse. [laughter] But he couldn't get in trouble 'cause he was runnin' to first base, and then he just stood there on her foot and then went on to second base. Wudn't nothin' could be done. But it was just a accident. Yeah.

DH: She probably watched him pretty close after that.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He was about the meanest one at the schoolhouse. It was good old days, and then there was some sad days out 'cause when I went to high school, they wanted me to play football. Well, I didn't know what a football field was. I didn't know what they was talkin' about. So when I got outta high school, I come back home. Well, I wasn't able to buy 'em a football, so we taken a oil can—a valvelene oil can—and it was round—it was a quart can, and that's what we played football with.

DH: At the Peyton Colony school.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. I got outta high school in '57. So I played football and taught the kids about football. And in '65, my cousin—when they went to Blanco, they was like—you know, they changed Blanco football team completely. Yeah. I got one cousin name Ronnie. He said that that was the reason Blanco got a new football stadium because of the things that he done for the football team. And it probably—they won state, and they won a bunch of stuff.

DH: When you were in school at the Peyton Colony schoolhouse, how many children were in it?

LC: It was like twenty somethin'.

DH: And you were all different ages, but you were all in the same—

LC: No. We had different grades. You know, like we had first, second. And this one teacher would teach all the grades. You know, we'd have to sit there and be quiet while she taught second grade, third grade, or whatever.

DH: Oh.

LC: And then work our way all the way up to the eighth grade. And it's kinda hard to understand now because she taught English, history. And we had arithmetic and all that kinda stuff. She did it all each day.

DH: And you had one stove in the school?

LC: Yeah. We had one old iron stove just like this one sittin' back here. That's the kinda heat we had.

DH: Play games or—

LC: We played softball. We didn't know nothin' about anything but softball or baseball. That's all we really know about. The young kids would play marbles. And I often think about it now. You know, if you play somethin'—talk about shootin' marbles, kids don't know nothin' about that. And we used to wear the knees our pants out crawlin' around on that old road out there playin' mar—

DH: Did you have any agates?

LC: Sir?

DH: Did you have any agates?

LC: What was that?

DH: That's the brown and white speckled marbles.

LC: Oh, no. My greatest marble was a steel ball—like a bearing. And we use it because you could bust those regular marbles with it. [laughter] We'd slip 'em in and bust somebody's pretty marble. That was one of our biggest things doin'.

DH: You don't see kids playing marbles anymore.

LC: No. No.

DH: Never.

LC: Never. It's all video game now.

DH: What do you think when you see the school right now?

LC: Well, I hate to see it lookin' like it's lookin' 'cause we could really fix that buildin' up and keep the memories that have went through that buildin'. We could keep it. That's what we need to do. We need to redo it—restore it. Yeah. And let people use it. It's too good a buildin' to just let disappear.

DH: Back in the early days of Peyton Colony—I've read a little bit in the county history book—it said that there were as many at one time as four hundred people.

LC: Yeah. This was our choir stayin' right here. And when I was goin' to church back in the 70s, it was pretty well full—all of these benches was—ten or fifteen. And we had a choir, and we had piano player and all of that.

DH: Can you remember about how many people lived right here around the church and in this area as part of Peyton Colony?

LC: Yeah. Well, back then there would probably be twenty-five different families—anywhere from twenty to twenty-five different families of people, maybe more.

DH: And what is it now?

LC: Oh, now, it's probably one [pauses and thinks]—maybe ten. I don't think it is—anywhere from five to ten families. It's more families still own some land, but they don't live here. They live in a different town.

DH: Did some of them ever come back to the service?

LC: Yeah. Yes. See what's sad about it now that we have got old and the people that moved away they gettin' old, they wanna move back home, but they can't afford the land. They sold it, and now they wanna buy some of it back. And they can't afford to buy none of the land back because it's too expensive now. But the ones that have kept their land, they come back, and we see each other, and we laugh and talk about old times that we used to have fun around here.

DH: You said you'd tell us one story one time about one of the benches in this school.

LC: Oh, we boys would always—you know how boys are—but what we would do if one of the boys would start actin' up or did somethin' to some of us that we didn't like, our main—the way we'd hurt a kid was the school benches was like these chairs right here that you could let out and let up. So then we'd vote and tell which one was gonna get in trouble. We know one of us is gonna have to get a whoopin', so we'd vote and say, Okay, it's your turn to do it. So we'd get a safety pin, and they'd let us out for recess. Well, we'd take that safety pin and put it in the toe of our shoe—we had some old, like, tennis shoes on. And you take the safety pin and run it through a shoe and turn it up. And then when the kids come in after recess and sit down, well, then you take the safety pin and just ease it up to the chair and just barely poke him in the hip with it. And they would jump up off the bench, and they'd scream. Well, you'd just ease it back down and take the pin and throw it away. [laughter] Teacher would say, "What's wrong with the boy?" And he'd say, "Well, somethin' stuck me." But he didn't know where it come from. [laughter] They couldn't prove it. That was one of the meanest thing we'd do at school if somebody would do somethin' bad.

DH: I wish that was the meanest thing people did in school today.

LC: Yeah. Yeah.

DH: We'd all be better off.

LC: Yeah. If we did somethin' bad enough that you'd get a whoopin', it wasn't just scoldin' 'em. She'd say, "Okay, go." She'd tell the biggest boy to go cut her a switch.

Well, if you were gonna' get a whoopin', you were gonna cut a pretty big switch [laughter] 'cause you enjoy watchin' 'im get a whoopin', see. And she'd stand 'im up in front of the class and say, "Okay, it's time for you to get a whoopin." And that was fun for us. We'd enjoy that. And what made me stop cussin'—I very seldom use a cuss word—and it was in 1956. This coach—I'd went to high school in Austin, so we didn't cuss. You know, you didn't cuss in high school. And we was playin' football, and I missed a pass. So when I missed the pass, all I said was, "God." That's all. But he hollered at me, and he said, "Go ahead and sit, Coffee. I heard that." So we go back, and we takin' a shower. I run and takin' a shower and put my clothes on. And we was walkin' out, and he said, "Coffee, you need to stop." I said, "Oh." And he had a paddle about this long and drilled holes in it. And he let the other boys stand behind, and he said, "Okay, you walk by, pull your pants down, and bend over." And he hit me one lick with that paddle, and I don't cuss no more. [laughter] That taught me not to cuss.

DH: They call that the board of education.

LC: Yeah. Had holes drilled in it.

DH: Yeah. I've seen those.

LC: You've probably seen one. Um hm. They don't use that kinda stuff no more.

DH: Back then, did Peyton Colony have any kind of a mayor or kind of an unofficial government or law enforcement?

LC: My dad.

DH: Your dad. [laughs]

LC: My dad. I mean my dad was like—you know, if it was any problems in Peyton Colony—it's so strange—they could holler. They could holler from house to house. And I remember that my granddaddy's house was like two miles further back. And one evenin', we was sittin' out on the porch, and we was playin', and he said, "Ya'll be quiet." So we shut up. And he stood up and hollered. And he could hear my uncle hollerin', but we didn't. And so they hollered three times, and he jumped on his horse and started runnin' to the back. And when he got back there with my uncle's sister, which was my dad's sister, which he had passed. And he could hear that. And this bell at the back of the church house was used on Sunday mornings, and then it was different rings of that bell, and anybody in Peyton Colony when they heared that bell, they'd come to this church because it'd be some kinda problem. And that's how we got communication

between the families—by the ringin' of that bell. The families knew that it was somethin' wrong.

DH: That's the same bell that's still here?

LC: Yeah. That's the bell right behind the church house. And if you started ringin' it, you could hear it all over—all over the Colony.

DH: If you were going to try to paint a picture of what Peyton Colony was back—pick any time when you were ten years old or eighteen years old—where was your most vivid memory of this place you call home?

LC: Oh, a fun town. People come here. You know, they just loved to come here. We'd have different programs. And right here at this church was mostly where our biggest fun times was. And during the Juneteenth celebration was a big time where all the people come together.

DH: What kind of music did you have? And what kind of food did you have?

LC: We'd have—it all started about—the families—that was one day that we'd all come together. And each family would either barbecue a goat or a sheep, whichever that family liked the most. So we had this barbecue pit up here that had wire over it, and it was just a hole in the ground. But all the family would bring wood together, and they'd pile it up. And the men at night—they'd stay down here all night. And they'd start a big fire, and they'd put coals up under the meat. And they'd skin the goats or the sheeps out up there by the live oak trees and quarter 'em up. And then lay 'em on the pit. They'd season 'em and lay 'em on the pit. And they'd barbecue 'em all night long. And then 'bout twelve o'clock the next day, you'd just see some horses ridin' this-a-way, wagons, or people in cars. Most the people from Blanco—they'd have cars and stuff, and they'd come down. And we'd all celebrate together. And that's one day that lots of people wouldn't miss. Even up to now, if we say that we havin' a celebration, and they know it's gonna be a lots of good food, so they come down and celebrate with us. That's one tradition that all of the older people around here—they never have forgot it. And they all come out on that special day. It kinda died down, but we have got together, and we started back to celebratin' that day. And we have it here in the lunch room now. We just do all the cookin' and stuff at home, and then we bring all the food down to the lunchroom at twelve o'clock on that day and celebrate here at the church. It's what we do.

DH: You planning to celebrate this year?

LC: Yeah. Yeah. We do it every year.

DH: And you have music?

LC: Um hm. I got a bunch of friends now that since that I've started tryin' to play, we all get together, and like on the day we have celebration, we just set up a PA system outside, and we play for hours. Yeah.

DH: And you mentioned earlier that at these celebrations as well as your Sunday services, you're likely to have a lot of white people celebrating with you.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. We celebrate nice. I don't know, but when the people come here, they seem like they get a different—they say it's just a different feeling. I don't know whether it's because they can relax or— Even with my sister—at her church, when you walk in her church, everything has gotta be by the clock. And they celebrate and they praise God, but it go kinda by the clock. And that's the way churches is now runned is by the clock. But with our church, we may be here at three o'clock. We say we have one service, and it may start at, say, ten o'clock or ten-thirty. And I teach Sunday school, and we get through, and we start singin' and playin'. Either somebody may wanna sing a song or whatever. We just start praisin' God. And it may last awhile. The preacher start preachin', and we don't know how long he's gonna preach. [laughter] So that's the way we have church.

DH: You briefly mentioned about when you started rodeoing, you couldn't participate with the white rodeo people until you just kind of stepped in and started it.

LC: Yeah. It wasn't easy. I got called lots of different names, but I smile and keep on goin'. I never was able to afford a good horse, so all I got is somebody's reject that they couldn't ride or they got tired of. So that's mostly the kinda horses I rode. And then I finally trained me a horse. I really know what rodeoin' was about, so I trained me a horse. And you can mention that horse's name all around, and people remember me ridin' that horse. One time in Seguin, we had a ropin' called breakaway. That's where whoever could rope the calf the quickest, then you tie a string at the end of it, and when the calf hit the end of the rope, breakaway from your saddle horn. Well, I won that particular event thirty-nine times in a row. And we went down every Tuesday night and had that ropin'. And we started out with a hundred ropers, and then it finally got down to about twenty-five. And the guy gave me a plaque for winnin' it. He said, "Anybody that could win a ropin' thirty-nine times in a row—he deserve a plaque." So he gave me a plaque.

DH: What was the name of that horse you mentioned?

LC: Midnight Annie.

DH: Midnight Annie?

LC: Yeah. Annie.

DH: Well, other than those experiences with breaking into the world of rodeo, your brief discussion about race relations—it makes it sound like Peyton Colony has really had a pretty good experience with the white people in Blanco and the surrounding area. Were there ever any really bad spots or problems in the town of Blanco itself?

LC: Well, when we was growin' up, it was certain places we knew we couldn't go.

DH: Like where?

LC: The bowlin' alley, the theater. We had to go upstairs when we went in the theater. We walked in the door and turn and go upstairs. And then when we went in the bowlin' alley or places, we had to eat in the back. Back in the kitchen part, they had a table for black to eat at, and that's where you go sit and eat at.

DH: And that changed in the '60s?

LC: Yeah. That changed in '65. Yeah. But it never did really mess with my mind. I never did have no hard feelings about it. My mother taught us like that. A man is a man until he prove hisself different. And it makes no difference what color you are, so that's the way we was taught. And when I started rodeoin', I rodeoed—a lots of my friends was white. And we rodeoed. When I went all over the world, it was me and one white boy, and he started out ropin'. And he told me when we got through that year—the last year we went together— he said he had more fun than he had ever had in his life of rodeoin'. And it was great. It was lots of fun.

DH: Mr. Coffee, we've talked just a little bit about this church—how long it's been here. But could you just tell us what all has been involved just keeping the structure solid?

LC: It's a scripture in the Bible where Jesus says, "Upon this rock I build my church." Well, this buildin' here is sittin' on rocks. And it makes me think about that. He said that buildin' is gonna stand. A buildin' that's built in sand won't stand. And when them old

people built this buildin', up under the bottom of it is big rocks. And they intended for it to stand. It also has got a cornerstone. And it talks about, in the Bible, about a cornerstone. And this church has got a cornerstone. So to me, it means that it must be carried on because for sixty-seven years—that's how old I am—and from the time I started realizin' what comin' to church and what it meant back then and what it means now, well, it's been a lots of hard work put in this buildin'. My mother was one of the hardest workin' since I remember in this church—helpin' carry it on. Between her and Deacon Jones, they was the ones. Before them, it was the Upshaws. All of those people were people that really worked to keep this buildin' goin'. So this buildin' started out with the black buildin' it, and then the whites started comin' at different times, different celebration. Now the generation now—this church is—the members are half black, and half of 'em are white. This house is God's house. It's not a black community's house or church. This is God's house. And we are the church. By we bein' the church—the members are the church. And God didn't say it had to be black members or white members so. But he uses people. Since we don't have the black that live here in this community to carry it on, God put somebody else here to keep His church goin' on. The Bible said when two or three join together, I can be in the midst. So by knowin' that and feelin' that, it don't make you feel bad when you set in here aint but three or four people here. Most people wanna go to a church where it's a bunch of people. But is the spirit really there? That's what you wanna go when you can relax—get that spirit filled in you, and you can enjoy comin' to church.

DH: You've done a lot of things. We haven't talked about your movie career. Can you tell us about some of the movies or some of the experiences with that?

LC: I was in a couple commercials. And then they called me one time, and I stopped by a place up here at Midway Farm, and they had a bunch of guys up there they was tryin' out, and it was all Spanish people there. And I stopped by talkin' to a friend of mine, and he said, "Why don't you try out for that movie?" And I says, "Well, it was all Spanish. They wanted vaquero, and it was all Spanish men." He said, "Well, just go over there and tell the man you wanna try out." And I said, "Okay." So I walked over there and told him. And he said, "Can you ride a horse?" I said, "Well, pretty good." [laughter] And he said, "Well, I need you to ride a horse out in the middle of the arena and make a circle." And he told me what I needed to do and come back. So I went over. "Boy," and I said, "they may use me." I said, "Saddle up me a horse." So he saddled me a horse, and I went out there and made a circle and come over and stop. And this guy said, "We need you." That's all he said. And about two weeks later, they called me and told me to come to San Antonio and get fitted to a outfit. And then we went to work in that movie when it come to San Antonio—that part of it. And it was a good experience.

DH: What movie was that?

LC: *All the Pretty Horses*. Yeah.

DH: They wanted you, but they didn't want your mustache.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. I couldn't talk no Spanish, but they told me to kinda say words and act like I was talkin' [imitates the way he talked in the movie]. [laughter] So it was fun. It was a experience. Yeah.

DH: What commercials were you in?

LC: There was—I cut a Chevrolet, and then another one was Texas Lottery. Yeah.

DH: Were you roping or riding?

LC: They had me on a deal where you rope this can. Yeah. You just set a can up and rope a can is what I did.

DH: That picture that we looked at of you, you were playing a guitar. If you wouldn't mind, Mr. Coffee, could you end this interview by playing a song? Would you do that?

LC: Yeah. I can play one. I can tell you the story that started my guitar stuff. Well, it was Leon's dad—well, he always played a guitar. So me and him worked together some, and we wanted to have us a band. And so we had a band. It was me and him and then two Spanish guys that lived in Blanco. We put us together a band. We'd play at night once or twice a week. So they wanted us to play up at the March of Dimes program at the school in Blanco. And whoever they voted to be the best band, well, they were gonna get to play in San Antonio on Channel 5. So we went up there and played, and we played a song, and we won the contest. So we got to play on Channel 5 in San Antonio. So we thought we had us a band. And we come back, and we kept practicin'. Well, there was a place in Bastrop where we had rodeos. And we could play one song real good. And I asked the guy could we have a dance there that night. So he rented us the buildin'. And as he rented us the buildin' after the rodeo, we'd go out in this buildin', and we start playin', and we charged \$5 a couple. And we filled this buildin' up with people. And we kept playin' that one song over and over. [laughter] That's all we could really play. So the people finally said, "Is that the only song ya'll know?" We said, "Really that's really all we can play." [laughter] So they start gettin' mad, and they want their money back. Well, there was a couple guys said, "We'll come in and fill in and help ya'll a little bit." So they come in, and we got through that night without havin' to give that

money back. And that ended our band. [laughter] When we got back home, that ended our band. [laughter] So then I quit playin', and I just try to play at home. My mother used to get mad because I didn't know but one beat. Take my guitar, and I could play, [plays a few bars] and that's all I knew what to do. [laughter] So my mother finally said, "You know, you got to quit doin' that. It's wearin' me to death." [laughter] So I got mad and disgusted. I put my guitar out in the washhouse—threwed it away. And it was a Fender Stratocaster. A friend come by and said, "Why don't you let me have that old guitar?" And I gave it to him. And now since I started back, that same guitar probably worth almost \$10,000. But anyway, when I started rodeoin' all over the world, I was in Billings, Montana. And I was gonna be there for a week. And I went to a pawn shop in Billings, Montana, and I bought me a acoustic guitar, and I didn't know how to play it. All I knew how to play was what I just did. So a guy at the rodeo that we travelled with—he knew how to play, so he showed me how to make some chord, and I started playin'. After I gave myself to the Lord, He helped me be able to sing some songs—doin' Christian song. And my mother knew I couldn't play a guitar, so I was here at church. So I'd learned how to sing a song called *This Little Light of Mine*. So I called her, and I told her, said "You gotta come to church. I'm playin' music—my guitar." And she said, "Oh, son, you really don't need to sing with guitar music." And I said, "Yeah. You gotta come." I said, "You know I read a scripture in the Bible where it says, 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.'" I said, "So my guitar music can be noise, and we're doin' what God say do." So she said, "Okay, I'll come." She'd come and go to church with me then. And that was a great feelin' for her to come back home and go to church. And like I said this song—God was usin' me, and I started practicin' and learnin' how to sing it. Song is called *This Little Light of Mine*. It goes— [sings *This Little Light of Mine*] Then I'd go around the rodeos, and I had my acoustic guitar, and I'd sit out there in the bleachers, and I'd start playin' [plays some bars]. And so one evenin', I was sittin' out there, and I said, "Otta be somethin' I can sing to that." And I started, and the song went— [plays introductory bars and then sings *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*] And see that's how God uses, you know. That's the Blues, the beat, but you can send a message singin' His words.

DH: You got back to that first riff that you ever learned.

LC: That's the first little part I ever learned when I first started playin' the guitar. Yes, sir.

DH: Mr. Coffee—Deacon Coffee, it has been a tremendous, great pleasure.

LC: Yes, sir.

DH: I enjoyed it.

Notes:

This interview was conducted and produced by the Oral History Committee of the Blanco County South Library District.

In spite of the best efforts of the Oral History Committee, some errors may be present in this transcription. Please refer to accompanying video for original source.

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